

Retention

The purpose of this chapter is to provide ombudsman programs with tools and strategies that promote retention of skilled and effective ombudsmen. While careful recruitment of the right ombudsman candidates and effective training are critical first steps in developing a qualified and successful long-term care ombudsman program, efforts that specifically target retention are equally important.

There are several successful practices in the area of retention that aid in the maintenance of a skilled ombudsman workforce. Understanding and supporting what motivates ombudsmen, both paid and volunteer, is essential to retaining a skilled ombudsman workforce. Other key elements of retention include providing continuous support for ombudsman staff and volunteers, acknowledging the importance of formal and informal recognition, implementing routine performance assessment, and establishing program policies and procedures that support and uphold ombudsman core values.

Successful ombudsman programs understand the value of continuous improvement through program evaluation and are attentive to feedback provided by these assessments. Effective ombudsman managers provide feedback to their ombudsman staff and volunteers and routinely seek input on program effectiveness. This input leads to changes in program management, training practices, and can also provide insight into successful recruitment strategies.

The chapter is divided into 2 broad sections: On-going Support & Recognition and Assessment & Supervision.

On-going Support & Recognition

- Methods of Providing On-going Support (mentorship, using the support group model, coaching)p.2
- Recognition Concepts (rules for recognition, planning worksheet).....p.4

Assessment & Supervision

- Assessment Tools (program and self-assessments, retention rates).....p.6
- Supervision (motivation, career ladders, grievance policies & procedures)..p.9
- Exit Interviews.....p.13

On-going Support and Recognition

Research on volunteer ombudsmen has revealed that one of the top three reasons that volunteers give for leaving the program is the need for more support or contact with the lead agency (or ombudsman program manager)¹. Regular contact between the ombudsman program manager and volunteer creates opportunities for technical assistance and is a way to reassure volunteers that they are important to the program. This suggests that one key area of retention is making sure that ombudsmen have consistent and frequent contact with Ombudsman supervisors.

Another important aspect of retention is providing recognition and feedback, especially when an ombudsman has been successful. Giving credit to the important contributions made by ombudsman staff and volunteers is not only important, but necessary.

Methods of Providing On-going Support

Mentorship

Ombudsman Programs have various ways of providing on-going assistance and support to staff and volunteers. Mentorship programs are one way to provide peer support for fledgling ombudsmen. A trained mentor can answer informal questions about the position as well as provide much needed technical support and coaching.

Group Meetings

Programs have also found the use of informal support group style meetings helpful. This is a method of peer support where programs provide opportunities (separate from regular training) for ombudsmen to share experiences and gain insight and knowledge from other ombudsmen. In some areas, programs hold quarterly discussion groups that are a way of building community among ombudsman volunteers. These often informal settings are more comfortable than official training sessions and allow ombudsmen to engage in conversations about topics that are most meaningful to them.

Telephone Reassurance

Additional strategies for providing on-going support include telephone reassurance programs where a volunteer routinely calls other volunteer ombudsmen to see how they are doing and to offer technical assistance and support as needed. Problems or concerns

¹ Nelson, W., Netting, E., Borders, K., & Huber, R. (2002). Reasons for Sustaining Long Term Care Ombudsman Service: Implications for Volunteer Retention. *Paper presented at the Gerontological Society of America annual meeting*, Boston, MA, November 2002.

Nelson, W., Hooker, K., DeHart, K., Edwards, J., & Lanning, K. (2004). Factors Important to Success in the Volunteer Long-Term Care Ombudsman Role. *The Gerontologist*, 44, 116-120.

are then reported back to the Ombudsman Supervisor for follow-up. Finally, monthly newsletters or regular e-mail contact are other ways that programs have sought to address the need for increased interaction.

The LTCOP: Rethinking & Retooling Recommendations (Bader Report)

Dr. Wayne Nelson, professor at Towson State University, Towson, MD and former Oregon Ombudsman is a leading researcher on ombudsman volunteer programs. The following recommendations from Dr. Nelson's paper "Training Qualifications for the LTCOP" from "The LTCOP: Rethinking and Retooling for the Future" relate to providing on-going support for ombudsmen:

- Provide regular meetings for ombudsmen volunteers to come together and discuss problems and provide support to one another (this decreases feelings of isolation).
- Within the 6 week to 2 month time frame, the LTCOP should provide, to new ombudsmen, a post-training reflection seminar to assess and validate the ombudsman's on-the-job learning experience and reinforce core concepts as needed.
- Establish regular community support group meetings where volunteers can discuss and analyze problems encountered on the job.

Appendix A - Sample Items²:

1. Mentorship Packet (Monroe County, NY LTCOP)
 - packet includes letter to ombudsman mentors providing some tips to prepare for the process
 - letter to newly trained ombudsmen included - explains the mentorship component as part of training process
2. Guidelines for Mentors (NASOP)
 - guidelines that were developed for State Ombudsman mentorship program and may also be useful to local ombudsman or volunteer ombudsman mentors (*some modification will be needed*)
3. The Volunteer Ombudsman (Wisconsin SLTCOP)
 - volunteer newsletter includes spotlight on volunteer section, tips and articles on substantive topics, welcomes and farewells

² Additional items related to mentorship can be found in Chapter 2 of the Compendium titled "Training."

4. Quarterly Discussion Group Materials (Suffolk County, NY LTCOP)
 - materials include an introductory memo about the discussion groups, a sample schedule, an evaluation tool, and a follow-up memo

Recognition Concepts

Making sure that recognition happens consistently is more important than the size of the gesture. Ombudsman recognition doesn't have to be flashy or costly. Recognition can be given in small thoughtful gestures such as sending a thank you card or rewarding someone with a certificate. However, larger forms of recognition such as receptions, banquets and gifts are also popular particularly with ombudsman volunteer programs. Never underestimate the value of effective praising.

A note about the value of volunteers:

Have you ever calculated the value of the number of hours ombudsman volunteers contribute to your program? A national survey of Giving and Volunteering in the United States provides some facts and figures related to the estimated value of volunteer contributions. Follow the link below to take you to the Independent Sector website where this information can be found:

http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/volunteer_time.html

This information interests a variety of people including local and state legislators and potential grant funders! Don't forget to share this information with your ombudsman volunteers during recognition events! See sample item #6 (below) for an example of how this information can be formatted for use in program advocacy.

Appendix B - Sample Items:

1. Effective Praising (TX SLTCOP)
 - handout provides tips for effective praising
2. Rules for Recognition (TX SLTCOP)
 - handout to help individuals think about providing recognition in meaningful ways
3. Heart of Our Program card (Suffolk County, NY LTCOP)
 - example of thoughtful, relatively low cost recognition strategy
4. Certificate of Appreciation (Pierce County, WA LTCOP)
 - another example of meaningful, relatively low cost recognition strategy

- signed by Director of County agency and Advisory Council member
5. Ombudsman Volunteer Award Nomination Form (OK SLTCOP)
 - an example of a form used to collect information about volunteer award candidates
 6. Value of Volunteers (OK SLTCOP)
 - handout is an example of how facts and figures related to the value of ombudsman volunteers can be presented in a format that might be useful to share with legislators or potential grant funders
 7. Ombudsman Volunteer Survival Kit (MO SLTCOP)
 - post card insert for a survival kit made as a gift item for a recognition event
 - clever and fun way to recognize contributions of ombudsman volunteers
 8. Program from Volunteer Ombudsman Recognition Banquet (East Tennessee LTCOP)
 - program from a winter volunteer banquet event where volunteer awards are presented
 - volunteer longevity is documented in program
 9. Volunteer Recognition Planning Idea List
 - includes tips and ideas for planning a volunteer recognition event

Assessment and Supervision

In addition to on-going support and recognition, ombudsmen (both paid and volunteer) need the opportunity to receive feedback that relates specifically to their role and duties. Yearly evaluations or assessments are an excellent way to provide this feedback. Assessments also provide an important opportunity for the program to receive input on the services and support it provides.

Effective ombudsman managers understand the basic principles of motivation and tools such as mentoring, coaching, and career ladders. They analyze feedback from retention tracking methods and exit interviews in order to modify and re-energize program policies and procedures.

Assessment Tools

Effective evaluation is a two way street. Feedback from an ombudsman manager to ombudsman staff or volunteers should be followed by feedback given by the staff or volunteers to the program manager. Meaningful evaluation is based on the position description and centered around performance of the duties related to the position. Anything addressed in the evaluation should be included in the position description.

Additionally, evaluation should be a routine process. Both individual and program evaluation should occur on an annual basis (at a minimum). Mechanisms for feedback should be standardized and addressed in program policies and procedures.

The LTCOP: Rethinking and Retooling Recommendations (Bader Report)

The following recommendations from Dr. Wayne Nelson relate to evaluation:

- If unable to regularly evaluate volunteers, the program should develop and disseminate annual self-appraisal forms soliciting volunteer feedback in order to identify perceived training needs and "morale slippage" as well as identify requests for help.
- Formal job appraisals identify training needs, provide recognition, provide means of continued communication of program principles, core values, etc.
- Well written ombudsman performance appraisals include: quantifiable job standards (ie. paperwork, visitation, etc.) and personality/behavior based character assessments (measure of assertiveness, judgment, initiative, discernment).

- At the very least, volunteers should be asked to evaluate their perception of effectiveness.

Sample Questions

Following are some sample questions that might be used in a self-appraisal form. They solicit program feedback and offer an opportunity for staff or volunteers to request help (as recommended in the Bader Report).

- What problems or frustrations have you had in your ombudsman work?
- What topics for continuing education do you feel would be helpful?
- When you need help, how does the state or local ombudsman program staff respond?
- How helpful are monthly (or quarterly) meetings?
- What would you change about monthly (or quarterly) meetings?
- Which ombudsman role (advocate, complaint investigator, or educator) do you find the most challenging? Why?
- What are some of the barriers that prevent you from accomplishing the goals of the LTCOP?
- During monthly (or quarterly) meetings, you are asked to share your experiences. How does this help or not help? Why?
- What else can be done to provide you with support in your work with this program?

Appendix C - Sample Items:

Ombudsman Evaluation Tools

1. Ombudsman Volunteer Evaluation (Salt Lake County, UT LTCOP)
 - example of an evaluation tool that feeds directly from a position description
2. Ombudsman Check List (Pierce County, WA LTCOP)
 - example of a volunteer ombudsman evaluation form that utilizes an assessment scale that includes categories - "Exceeds Standard," "Meets Standard," and "Needs Additional Training"
3. Mentor Program Evaluation (California SLTCOP)
 - example of an evaluation tool used by an ombudsman mentor
 - incorporates Bader Report recommendations related to the inclusion of quantifiable job standards and personality/behavior based character assessments

4. Volunteer Ombudservice Program Evaluation (Rochester, NY LTCOP)
 - example of an ombudsman self-evaluation that solicits feedback about several aspects of program effectiveness including training
 - also includes questions about suggestions for future training topics, participation in small group meetings, and willingness to serve as a mentor
5. Self-Assessment Tool for Volunteer Ombudsmen (Northern VA LTCOP)
 - includes a cover letter to the volunteer about the purpose and goal of the self assessment
 - this tool is designed to be used solely by the volunteer - it is not turned in but serves as an exercise in reviewing the role and responsibilities of the volunteer ombudsman

Program Assessment Tools

6. Volunteer Program Self-Assessment Checklist (The National Consumer Protection Technical Resource Center)
 - short check list that covers areas specific to volunteer programs (ie. program development, recruiting, retaining, recognizing)
7. Shadowing Experience Evaluation (Salt Lake County, UT LTCOP)
 - example of a form that collects feedback from the ombudsman volunteer about his/her shadowing of an ombudsman trainer or certified ombudsman
8. Annual Assessment Preparation Checklist and Assessment Tool (OK SLTCOP)
 - example of assessment tools to be used by the State Ombudsman Program with local ombudsman programs
 - this example focuses on program that is housed in an Area Agency on Aging
9. Volunteer Ombudsman Program Self-Assessment Tool (Robyn Grant, NORC Consultant)
 - adapted from the Self-Evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement Tool developed for Local Ombudsman Programs
 - this tool focuses on areas specific to volunteer ombudsman programs with a focus on recruitment, training, supervision & support, retention, and recognition,

10. LTCO Program Standards - Volunteer Management (WA SLTCOP)

- Tool lists basic and exemplary practices in areas related to recruitment, screening, training, placement, supervision, evaluation, and de-certification
- space is provided for notes

Supervision

Central to knowing what makes ombudsmen remain with the program is understanding what attracts them to the program in the first place. Motivation is a key concept in retention. Most theories of motivation suggest that an individual is guided by a need for one of the following: achievement, power, affiliation, recognition, or altruism. Once a supervisor understands what motivates an individual, it may be easier to provide feedback and incentives that lead to a long-term commitment.

Armed with knowledge about motivation, a manager can more effectively use the supervisory tools of feedback, rewards, recognition, and training. Research regarding volunteer ombudsmen indicates that younger volunteers are motivated by the skill building, networking, and resume building aspects of the ombudsman position. Older adults, on the other hand, tend to be attracted to the position as a way of maintaining social connections and/or replacing roles lost or changed by retirement. This research suggests that older ombudsman volunteers are often motivated by altruism or the desire to help others³.

In addition to understanding motivation, ombudsman supervisors must recognize an individual's need for personal growth and development. Career ladders offer an advancement opportunity for volunteer ombudsmen that have motivational merit. States that offer career ladders have at least 2 tiers. The first tier offers ombudsman volunteers a chance to get their feet wet by focusing on visitation and basic complaints. To advance to the second or subsequent tiers, volunteers must complete additional training and certification requirements. A third tier might include opportunities to serve as a mentor for new ombudsman volunteers or serve as a team leader providing support and coaching for volunteer ombudsmen as they are advancing.

Finally, an integral part of supervising ombudsmen is ensuring that the program has policies and procedures that uphold ombudsman program values and practices. Good

³ For additional information on research related to ombudsman volunteers go to the NORC website at www.ltcombudsman.org and follow the "Volunteer Coordinator's Network" link. See notes from the conference call "Identifying Characteristics of Effective Ombudsmen, Screening Strategies and Interview Techniques" from 8/31/05.

policies support program values by addressing issues such as confidentiality, conflict of interest, protocol for responding to complaints or concerns, as well as guidelines for responding to complaints against ombudsmen (both paid and volunteer). For sample program policies and procedures, see the NORC website at: http://www.ltcombudsman.org/ombpublic/49_507_3222.cfm

Institute of Medicine (IoM) Guidance

The following excerpts from the Institute of Medicine Study relate to management of ombudsman volunteers. The committee involved in the study made recommendations regarding the ratio of ombudsman managers (or volunteer managers) to the number of volunteers:

- p.160 - "All volunteers working under the auspices of the ombudsman program can make their most valuable contributions if they are working with an efficiently managed program."
- p.160 - "The committee noted that it suggests a minimum standard, particularly at the 1:40 level. It strongly encourages state LTC ombudsman programs to maintain paid staff-to-volunteer ratios at levels that are far more robust than the 1:40 level."

The LTCOP: Rethinking and Retooling Recommendations (Bader Report)

The following recommendations from Dr. Wayne Nelson's paper "Training Qualifications for the LTCOP" from "The LTCOP: Rethinking and Retooling for the Future" relate to supervision and retention of ombudsmen:

- Develop distinct career tracks with titled grades of advancement within specific volunteer roles. Support these career ladders with continuing service courses, and testing for the highest grade.
- Develop clear and comprehensive progressive disciplinary and grievance policies. Data concerning performance problems and complaints against ombudsmen are important adjuncts to regular program training audits.

Appendix D-1 - Sample items:

Program Management - items related to managing and motivating ombudsmen

1. Motivating Volunteers Fact Sheet (NV Cooperative Extension)
 - tips for working with volunteers and understanding motivators
 - good reference section for general volunteer resources

2. Volunteer Management (TX SLTCOP)
 - guidelines for ombudsman volunteer managers relating to establishing policies and on-going supervision
3. 11 Guaranteed Ways to Kill Motivation (TX SLTCOP)
 - information might be used as a handout for ombudsman supervisors or ombudsman volunteer coordinators
4. Volunteer Management & Recruitment Quiz (OK SLTCOP)
 - quiz distributed to volunteer ombudsman coordinators that could be used as planning tool
 - questions relate to management of an effective volunteer ombudsman program
5. Coaching for Improved Performance (TX SLTCOP)
 - handout provides principles for coaching to enhance performance
 - includes worksheet to document coaching session

Appendix D-2 - Sample items

Career ladders - examples of items related to offering volunteer ombudsman career ladders

1. Volunteer Ombudsman Mentor position description (Northern VA, LTCOP)
 - position description for a volunteer ombudsman mentor that lists qualifications, responsibilities, and training and supervision
 - qualifications include a minimum of 3 years experience with the volunteer program
2. Training Agendas for 2 levels of volunteer ombudsman training (Salt Lake County, UT LTCOP)
 - example includes an explanation of 2 distinct levels of training for ombudsmen volunteers
 - level 1 agenda includes 2 days of training; level 2 training includes 4 days of training and completion of a certification exam
3. Quality Issues Specialist Volunteer Position Description (Salt Lake County, UT LTCOP)
 - position description for an entry level volunteer
4. Certified Ombudsman Volunteer Position Description (Salt Lake County, UT LTCOP)

- position description for a second level position provided for volunteers
5. Long-Term Care Visitors & Certified Ombudsmen (LA SLTCOP)
 - brochure that describes 2 levels of ombudsman volunteer training and responsibility

Appendix D-3 - Sample items

Policies & Procedures - items related to ombudsman program policy and sample procedures

1. TA Memorandum re: Ombudsman Disciplinary Procedures (TX SLTCOP)
 - Memo gives context for the need to have established Ombudsman disciplinary policies and procedures
 - Covers performance planning, conflict prevention/resolution, establishing a discipline system, and dismissal
2. Volunteer Ombudsman Complaint Resolution Procedures (TX SLTCOP)
 - details the minimum policy requirements for TX Ombudsman volunteer complaint resolution procedures
3. De-Designation Policy (AR SLTCOP)
 - details the authority of the State Ombudsman to de-designate representatives of the program and their right to appeal
4. Grievance Procedures (WA SLTCOP)
 - layout includes the state regulatory reference, purpose, and grievance standards
 - procedures for both volunteer and paid ombudsmen are included
5. Ombudsman Program Policies and Procedures (Salt Lake County, UT LTCOP)
 - sample P&P sections covering grievance procedures, volunteer staff evaluation, resignation/removal of the volunteer, decertification procedure, & involuntary decertification with cause
 - Entire comprehensive P&P manual can be accessed on the NORC website at:
<http://www.ltcombudsman.org/uploads/UTOmbproceduremanual.pdf>

Exit Interviews

The exit interview is a valuable tool in identifying problem areas that have an impact on retention. The key to utilizing this tool successfully is to structure the interview with carefully selected open ended questions that help gather information most constructive for change. Feedback from exit interviews may be used to streamline the screening and recruiting processes, bolster training efforts, and identify areas for improvement in management practice.

The face-to-face exit interview is used more often with paid ombudsmen, however exit interviews are as important for paid staff as they are for volunteers. The face-to-face exit interview may be the best chance that ombudsman program managers have to gather feedback about why volunteers leave the program.

To minimize the stress of a face-to-face exit interview, some states have volunteers who conduct exit interviews, especially with other volunteer ombudsmen. A volunteer may feel more comfortable with a peer and in turn may be more forthcoming. Some programs use exit surveys rather than interviews where outgoing volunteers are mailed a letter asking them to provide feedback related to their experience with the program.

Whatever the method, effective programs learn from outgoing ombudsmen. These programs also recognize that to retain successful ombudsman program staff, they must constantly be evaluating and revising recruitment, training and retention strategies.

The LTCOP: Rethinking and Retooling Recommendations (Bader Report)

Dr. Wayne Nelson suggests that exit interviews are an important aid to training coordinators. He suggests the following regarding exit interviews:

- A well-designed exit interview can provide valuable information to ombudsman trainers.
- To make the exit interview more reliable consider using trained volunteers to conduct exit interviews with ombudsmen leaving the program. This method can help identify morale problems, training needs, and policy conflicts.

Appendix E - Sample items:

1. Ombudsman Volunteer Program Exit Interview (Salt Lake County, UT LTCOP)
 - concise exit survey used to give insight into why a volunteer has left the program
 - collects information on how long a volunteer has served, reasons for leaving, and suggestions for the program
2. LTC Ombudsman Volunteer Exit Interview (HI SLTCOP)
 - 2 page survey that uses mostly open-ended questions to solicit feedback
 - several questions are tailored to gather feedback about the adequacy of training
3. Volunteer Advocate Survey (MN SLTCOP)
 - Survey is accompanied by a letter to the outgoing volunteer
 - questions positively centered around the volunteer's experience with the program and require the volunteer to reflect on the quality of their efforts as well as the program's
4. Exit Interview Survey (KS SLTCOP)
 - comprehensive exit survey includes a letter to the outgoing volunteer
 - survey is a mix of multiple choice & open-ended questions that focus on the following areas: General information, Communication/Information Flow, and Training & Development

Conclusion

Retention has been the topic of this third and final chapter of the Ombudsman Compendium. As stated throughout, recruitment, training and retention are intertwined. Changes and or modifications in one area will impact another. Understanding what causes ombudsmen to leave the program, may help ombudsman programs make improvements that not only impact retention, but also reveal needed change in recruitment strategies and training practices.

Successful ombudsman retention strategies include providing on-going support to ombudsmen through a variety of strategies including the use of mentoring, informal support meetings, and regular & on-going communication with staff and volunteers. Effective ombudsman managers also use tools such as praise and recognition.

Routine assessments based on position descriptions provide additional opportunities for ombudsman staff to receive recognition as well as provide input on how the program as a whole is performing. Annual evaluations, combined with supervision that places value on an ombudsman's need for professional growth and development, provide support that inspires long-term commitment.

Finally, effective ombudsman programs support good practices in the areas of retention, training, and recruitment by having well designed policies and procedures. These policies and procedures uphold ombudsman core values by addressing conflicts of interest and confidentiality. They detail ombudsman procedures regarding complaint investigation and provide protocol for handling complaints against ombudsmen.